



EXHIBIT 1
DATE 03/21/07
SB 123

Montana Office of Public Instruction

Linda McCulloch
State Superintendent

House Education Committee
March 21, 2007
Senate Bill 123 Full-Time Kindergarten
Superintendent Linda McCulloch's Remarks

For the Record, I am Linda McCulloch, State Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Thank you to Sen. Carol Williams and Rep. Wanda Grinde for sponsoring SB 123, for Full-Time Kindergarten which is requested by the Office of Public Instruction.

BACKGROUND

Today 63% of kindergarten students nationwide attend a full-time program.

In Montana, 65 school districts (89 schools) offer a Full-Time Kindergarten program. This represents 29% of kindergarten students around the state who are attending a Full-Time Kindergarten program. These school districts decided to expand the kindergarten day because it supports what their kids need for continued academic and social success.

In a report from the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis several longitudinal studies show that focusing on at-risk families far exceeds the return to other projects that are funded as economic development. These show a rate of return from \$3 to \$9 for every dollar invested – an annual rate of return of 7 to 16 percent. A current update of one of the studies actually shows the total benefit-cost ratio at \$17 for every dollar invested. This is not only great education but great economic development for Montana!

In 2006, Wyoming unanimously passed legislation to fund Full-Time Kindergarten for their students.

ACADEMIC BENEFITS

Full-Time Kindergarten has been proven to be a vital step in starting children on a successful path to learning. Children who are enrolled in Full-Time Kindergarten programs, in comparison to half-day programs, demonstrate:

1. Greater progress in reading, math and general learning skills
2. Significant gains in social and emotional development
3. Fewer grade retentions and special education placements
4. Higher scores on achievement tests
5. Reduced behavioral problems
6. Significantly stronger academic gains over the course of the kindergarten year than their half-day counterparts
7. Levels the playing field for disadvantaged kids who enter school already behind
8. Effective in closing the achievement gap and lowering dropout rates
9. Positive effect on both short and long term student achievement
10. Significantly higher report of homework completed at age 15

Repeated studies have shown there have been NO detrimental effects to children attending Full-Time Kindergarten. Students easily adjust to longer days in school without any major difficulties. In reality,

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students are better prepared for a successful transition to first grade. The key to a successful Full-Time Kindergarten program is age appropriate learning activities – geared to a five year old.

The benefits to Full-Time Kindergarten do not end when the student completes their kindergarten year. Studies show there is a positive effect on both short and long term student achievement.

Full-Time Kindergarten is also a question of equity. To allow only parents who can afford to pay for private Full-Time Kindergarten have access to this program is giving advantage to the advantaged. Our Montana students become Montana adults. We need them equipped to be productive members of our State. Full-Time Kindergarten can help produce that result.

ECONOMIC BENEFITS

The economical benefits of Full-Time Kindergarten extend beyond the classroom. Research on "quality early education" emphasizes the long-term benefits for the student and society. A longitudinal study revealed that students with early childhood education opportunities were more likely to complete a higher level of schooling, have higher monthly earnings at age 27 and were more likely to own a home. These students were also less likely to receive social services and had fewer arrests. The engine that drives economic development really is education and in this case early education.

PARENTAL CONTROL

SB 123 does **NOT** require parents to enroll their child in Full-Time Kindergarten. Enrollment of students in Full-Time Kindergarten will be voluntary, just as half-time kindergarten is now. Parents will decide if their child is ready for full-time, half-time or no kindergarten at all. I appreciate parents who believe that their child is not ready for a full day of kindergarten or who believe that their child will benefit more from spending the other half of the day at home with them. I applaud the decision made in the best interest of their child.

I ask that you do not take away from other parents the ability for them to make a decision in the best interest of their child. Parents deserve to be able to choose Full-Time Kindergarten if that is in the best interest of their child.

LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICT CONTROL

Local school boards would have the option to provide Full-Time Kindergarten based on a district's budget, facilities, staff and local needs, and would be responsible for implementing it in a way that most benefits their students and their school system.

Research shows there are savings to be had in the reduction of high cost students by fewer grade retentions and special education placements. Cost savings will be realized in the elimination of mid-day buses.

FUNDING

I am also requesting through House Bill 2 \$10 million in one-time-only funding for initial start up costs. Some school districts may have difficulty providing Full-Time Kindergarten initially because of staff, budget, or facility limitations. Providing startup costs would help districts overcome the financial barrier.

RESEARCH

There are numerous studies on Full-Time Kindergarten. I have based my support for Full-Time Kindergarten on studying all the research and on results observed in Montana schools. To base an important decision such as the early childhood education of our Montana students on just a single study would be irresponsible.

Mention has been made in recent days of the RAND study on School Readiness. The RAND study is in complete contradiction to dozens of other state and national studies. In the world of researchers there are many objections being voiced to the methodology used in this study. Since no other credible research supports their findings the credibility of this study is in question. Again, the sensible route for Full-Time Kindergarten is to look at the multiple studies that are available and not base public policy on one outlying piece of research.

The RAND study also confirms what the Great Falls School District has known for many years. If the first, second, third and so on, teachers do not ratchet up their classroom curriculums then the increased skills learned in Full-Time Kindergarten may be lost by the fifth grade.

CLOSING

Full-Time Kindergarten isn't about politics or partisanship. SB 123 passed out of the full Senate on a bipartisan vote. While we both support it, Full-Time Kindergarten is not about the Governor or me. It's not Democrat or Republican. It's about 145,416 Montana students. It's about the 10,000 kindergarten students enrolled this year, 10,000 next year, 10,000 the year after, and so on. It's all about your children, your grandchildren, and the kids next door. And it is about their future and Montana's future.

I respectfully ask the committee to support SB 123 and let the entire House debate this program. In fact, I challenge you to put this issue before all of your colleagues. Thank you for your time today.